

July 2003



# IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

## Environmental Health Education and Assessment Program

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### Summary of the Public Health Assessment for the St. Maries Creosote Site

#### What has happened at the site?

From 1930 until 1960, the site operated as a wood pole treating plant. Wood poles were treated with creosote and then loaded on to rail cars for transport. The site now operates as a pole peeling and storage yard. In December 1998, the City of St. Maries detected a creosote sheen in the water and on the bank of the St. Joe River.

In February 1999, the City of St. Maries and Carney Products removed 195 tons of creosote contaminated soil and debris along the St. Joe riverbank. Afterwards, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and their contractor conducted an investigation to find out how much contamination was still present. In December 2000, EPA proposed adding the site to the National Priorities List.

As a result, the Idaho Division of Health (IDOH) conducted a public health assessment (PHA) to study potential public health effects of site contamination.

#### What kind of contamination was found?

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) made up 80 percent of the creosote preservative used in treating wood poles at the site. PAHs were detected in site soils, sediments along the river bank, surface water next to the site, and groundwater beneath the site. There are more than 100 different compounds that are considered PAHs. The PAHs of concern at the site are benzo(a)pyrene, benzo(a)anthracene, and dibenz(a,h)anthracene.

#### How might I be exposed to site contaminants?

People may be exposed to, or come in contact with, site contaminants in a variety of ways. Touching or swallowing contaminated site soils, groundwater beneath the site, river bank sediments, or water from the St. Joe River are possible sources of exposure.

People can be exposed to site contamination by swimming or wading in the St. Joe River next to the site. People also could be exposed to site contamination by walking on or playing in site soils in the area of contamination. Site workers could be exposed to PAHs when working in the area of contamination.

#### Can I become sick if I am exposed to contaminants found at the site?

If you are not exposed to a contaminant, it cannot harm your health. If you avoid the site, you will not be exposed to its contaminants.

If you trespass on or swim next to the site, you could be exposed to site contaminants. However, after reviewing available data, IDOH concluded that exposure to site contaminants is unlikely to result in any adverse health effects for the general public. This conclusion was made based on the assumption that site visitors would have limited contact with site contaminants over the short period they would be on the site.

Water from domestic wells near the site has not been tested for the presence of contaminants. Therefore, it is not known if domestic well owners downstream from the site are being exposed to site-related contaminants in groundwater.

## **What are IDOH's recommendations?**

IDOH, a non-regulatory public health agency, developed recommendations to reduce potential exposures to site-related contaminants. Precautionary recommendations are:

- People should be prevented from swimming near the river bank next to the site;
- The public also should be prevented from entering the site;
- No trespassing signs should be posted at the site boundary. No swimming signs should be posted in the river near the site;
- Site workers should avoid or reduce contact with soil in the area of contamination; and
- Groundwater samples from domestic wells near the site should be collected and tested for site-related contaminants.

## **What actions are planned for the future?**

The following is a list of actions planned by IDOH:

- IDOH will review domestic well water quality results and additional environmental data as it becomes available;
- IDOH will revise its public health action plans for the site as necessary; and
- EPA will complete a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study for the site.

## **How can I get a copy of the public health assessment?**

Concerned citizens are encouraged to obtain the public health assessment for more in-depth information and to provide written comments. To obtain one or for information about hazardous wastes and toxic substances, contact:

**Bureau of Community and Environmental Health (BCEH)**  
Environmental Health Education and Assessment  
450 W. State St. 6th Floor, Boise, Idaho 83720-0036  
Toll Free: 1-866-240-3553  
(208) 334-0606  
[BCEH@idhw.state.id.us](mailto:BCEH@idhw.state.id.us)